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METHOD AND MATERIAL IN POLITICAL INSTRUCTION

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It is a significant fact in the history of political instruction that the American Political Science Association and the National Municipal League should be making a simultaneous effort to investigate the content, method, and proportion of such instruction, with a view to offering definite and helpful suggestions to teachers of the subject. And that at the same time the National Educational Association, through its committee on social studies, unwilling to wait for further data, has begun to sketch out for the secondary school a program of economic and civic instruction combined that shall mark a radical departure from the formal textbook course in government. Dr. Haines will tell you of your own committee's work, and Mr. Dunn of that of the Municipal League's committee, for the two are now coöperating. I shall avail myself of the National Educational Association preliminary report¹ as a point of departure for this paper.

This tentative report recommends five possible units of social science for the secondary school, including history, economics, and civics, each unit to represent three or four periods a week for a year. The history is to be radically changed in content, so as to help to an understanding of present-day political and social institutions—a problem with which the American Historical Association has just been wrestling in Charleston. The introductory unit in civics (to find its place eventually in the seventh and eighth years of the elementary school) is to relate the pupil to his political environment, to acquaint him with his privileges and duties as a citizen—in a word, to teach him to think civically, and to *act* as he *thinks*. As a further aid to good citizenship a survey of vocations is outlined, that shall help the boy and girl to “find themselves” industrially when the school days are ended. The advanced unit in social science consists of a half-year of elementary economics, followed by a half-year of rather serious study of governmental forces and the machinery through which these forces act.

¹ Bulletin No. 41, 1913, U. S. Bureau of Education.

Those who have worked at this outline believe that it will be of value both to the boy and girl who go on to college and to those not so fortunate. As college instructors, in the main, the members of this Association are naturally most interested in the few survivors of the academic Marathon who finally arrive on the college campus. So it will be appropriate to discuss the sort of political training these racers ought to receive in order to be in the best possible trim for the severer tests of college days. As a one-time college professor, and now a teacher in a normal college for men, I may perhaps be justified in claiming that my point of view is not altogether theoretical.

Other things being equal, will not those students be most satisfactory to us who have already been brought into closest contact with their real social environment? Will not those students be best prepared for collegiate instruction in government and politics, for college life itself, and for the teaching of civics or for leadership in affairs when college days are over, who have touched the realities of civic life in a way that was educational because direct and genuine? The average freshman enters college without civic instruction or civic ideals. For the student in moderate circumstances this is a misfortune; for the "poor rich" young men and women it is especially unfortunate. Surrounded by those in the same social stratum as themselves, and without the spur of economic necessity, they are too apt to think of college as primarily a place where they may make congenial and influential friendships that will be a source of pleasure and profit in later life. And the almost hopeless problem of the college is to develop in these young people social ideals that shall carry them out to a life of service. How much better it would be, for college and students alike, were the latter "caught young," back in the impressionable days of the elementary and secondary school, and given sensible political instruction along with the languages, mathematics and science! If you believe that such instruction is worth while, today's discussion of ways and means is surely most appropriate.

Having a rare opportunity to experiment with civic instruction in the elementary school, through our practice school (fifth to eight grades inclusive), we were determined to work out a course of instruction that should relate the children to their social environment and thereby train them for effective citizenship. Our first step has been to show the child, in very definite and practical ways, that the social world round about him is made up of various communities: the home, the school, the church, the shop, the city, the state, the nation; that from each of these communities he, as a citizen, receives unnumbered privileges and bless-

ings, and to each is under definite and serious obligations. This idea of citizenship in the large once grasped, the boy is easily carried over to one particular type, political citizenship. He is made to feel that the good citizen is one who is both able and willing to contribute his share in community action.

However, we have found that the qualities of good citizenship cannot come from a mere accumulation of dry and more or less unrelated facts, nor from abstract generalizing about those facts; they must arise from a live, intelligent interest, which can be cultivated only by direct contact with community action, by enriching and capitalizing the child's own social experience. Accordingly, our civic work throughout the four years has come to be just as alive and concrete as we know how to make it.

During the first half of the grammar school period the child is still revelling in the hero-worshipping stage—the idealizing of men and things. Hence it is a most valuable opportunity for helping him to understand, and thus to idealize, community service. During the fifth year a beginning is made with the child's common experiences within his home and his school, or within the immediate vicinity. The topics taken up are: gas, electricity, water, sewage, and the telephone; the policeman, the fireman, the street sweeper, the garbage collector, the ashes collector. A preliminary class discussion of each is followed by a trip, taken either by the whole class or by some of its members, and then a report to the class of what was seen. In the final discussion care is taken to bring out, by careful questioning which follows the lines of the pupils' own observation and experience, what the boys themselves may do or refrain from doing as their contribution to this community service. The sixth year is taken up, first, with various educational institutions, including libraries, museums, historical buildings and localities; and second, with public buildings, such as city hall, mint, customs house, armories and arsenals. The method used is similar to that employed in the preceding year.

Throughout the fifth and sixth years the one end and aim is to acquaint the child, in a practical and interesting way, with his civic environment and with the reciprocal relationship existing between the community and the citizen. Under this sort of stimulus the boys are coming to appreciate the difference between clean streets and dirty ones, between well paved thoroughfares and badly paved ones—in short, between community action which is efficient and that which is inefficient. And they want to help keep their city clean and healthful and beautiful. Would not this seem to be a fairly safe basis of good citizenship, and a reasonably solid foundation for later political instruction?

Thus far the word "government" has not been used, unless inadvertently: only the more general term "community." But during the seventh and eighth years more attention can be safely given to the end and aim of governmental activity, and to the way in which public and private agencies unite to accomplish results. The seventh year is mainly devoted to municipal government, using Philadelphia as a basis of comparison with a few other cities; while the eighth year is equally divided between state and nation, with Pennsylvania as the basis of comparison. But this distinction, so artificial to the child, is constantly broken over in the discussion of governmental activities.

First to be considered is how the community, be it city, state, or nation, helps the normal citizen in his need for protection of person and property, for good working and business conditions, for transportation, education, recreation. Then follow briefer discussions of how each political unit takes care of its subnormal citizens: the dependents, the defectives, and the delinquents. As each function is discussed, the organization of the government—local, state, or national—to do this work is outlined, with occasional reference to ordinances or laws or charters or constitutions. And the way in which private agencies unite with public departments or bureaus is explained, that the pupil may understand one of the ways in which government and citizen work together. Finally, how government gets the money to do its work is not forgotten.

Of course, the touch must be light during these four years or the pupil would be weighed down with confusing detail. The object throughout is, not to impart the greatest possible number of facts, but to make the best possible citizens. Accordingly, this all-important point is never lost sight of: to follow the order of the child's own interest and appreciation, namely, from function to structure, from the administrative department which does things to the legislative which plans the things to be done and then to the judicial which interprets and helps enforce these plans, and only when necessary to the charter or constitution which lays down legal powers and duties. To reverse this order in the secondary school is to deprive civic training of fifty per cent of its interest and value: in the elementary school the loss is one hundred and five per cent, at the lowest calculation!

Civics has long been at a disadvantage with the natural sciences because it did not, and supposed it could not, employ the laboratory method. Whatever might have been done in the past, there is no excuse for longer neglect in developing civic laboratories in both elementary and secondary schools, when the various political units—local, state, and

national—are publishing understandable accounts of their workings and are making these accounts easily accessible. Maps, charts, photographs, lantern-slides, plans and specifications, samples of pavement or other building material, departmental reports, laws and ordinances, charters and constitutions—all these, and many more which your own ingenuity can supply, lie within reach of the resourceful teacher of civics.

I have tried to show that political instruction—I like to call it civics, even if the name has been so badly misused—is not a series of cold and indigestible facts, unrelated to life. Civics is itself a life, a growth, democracy in the making! This means that it must be given adequate time in the school curriculum, and that it must be continuous and cumulative throughout at least the first eight years of school life. With this as the foundation something worth while may be accomplished in the high school period, for the 20 per cent who are so fortunate as to reach the People's College. And now a few words as to what may be done there, alike for those who will go on to more advanced instruction and for those who will not: for believe me, Mr. College Professor, the needs of the two are identical in this field of education, and no differentiation should be permitted.

A splendid experiment in the newer sort of civic training, of which I have personal knowledge, is now being conducted in the William Penn High School for Girls, Philadelphia. Unfortunately, the old-time Constitution memorizing performance is still in vogue in that city, though a radical revision is imminent. So the work at the William Penn cannot be as advanced as it will be in the future. The brief time at the disposal of civics, in the senior year, is taken up mainly with a somewhat detailed study of the home city. Instead of wasting precious hours with abstract discussions in constitutional law, the girls are directed into a most valuable study of the vital problems of health, sanitation, building regulations, water supply, sewage and garbage disposal, street cleaning, lighting and paving, police and fire protection, transportation, city planning, education, contracts and franchises, and revenues.

The girls were supremely indifferent, in the old days, as to exactly how the federal executive may act as a check upon the legislature. But they are taking a keen and sustained interest in this new type of political training, for they are at last getting answers to questions they really want answered. And this is not all. These girls become possessed by another motive—the true goal of the educational process—that of wanting to do something about it if conditions need righting. *They have learned to*

think civically. Let me illustrate by a story I told, some time ago, in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

One of these girls, after studying housing conditions, went to call on her washerwoman to see what life was like in one of the city's worst enclosed courts. She was taken about the neighborhood and shown all the things the landlord ought to have done, but had not. "And the owner of the buildings is a good church member, too!" commented the girl, indignantly. How long, think you, will enclosed courts and narrow alleys and bad sanitary conditions prevail, once the citizens know the facts and learn to interpret these facts rightly? Even good church members will have to get busy if they are profiting in this unregenerate fashion.

Once the proper foundation is laid in the elementary school, and the history is socialized in the earlier years of the secondary school, the senior high school year of social science as outlined in the National Educational Association report should be well within the possibility of attainment. It would mean a year of elementary economic and political theory, practically applied to the concrete problems of the day; to the end, that the student should lay hold upon the one essential truth: that there is gradually coming into the world of human affairs, economic and social and political democracy—a Garden of Eden at the end of the story rather than at the beginning.